

Judy: How did you happen to come to Coupeville?

Michael – Helen Chatfield (Weeks) and her husband, John, and family lived about 300 feet from us in Redlands California back in 1967-69. Helen's son David was a very good friend of mine and we spent much time at the Chatfield home. In 1969 Colonel Chatfield was diagnosed with cancer and given 6 months to live. He made preparations to move the family to Washington and bought a house on Scenic Heights Rd. near Oak Harbor. Colonel Chatfield passed away just a few months after he had moved his family here.

I came up here for David's Dad's funeral in August of 1969 and did not return to California until I found out that I would soon be drafted; which was in early 1970. My draft number was "23", which meant a tour in Vietnam if I did not join another service voluntarily. I joined the Air Force and was assigned to Berlin, West Germany as a linguist later that year. My service was short lived as I suffered a ruptured brain aneurysm while on duty with the Air Force, which led to an early discharge. After a short visit with my family in California, I migrated back to Whidbey Island where I ended up living at Helen's house. She was a wonderful host and surrogate mom to me and living there helped me to get on my feet, but I soon decided to live on my own. Prior to renting a home of my own I bought a 12' trailer and camped at the home of various friends. In 1971 I went to work for the Captain Whidbey Inn as a groundskeeper; a job which led to being a waiter and then a Bartender for the rustic inn. John and Shirley Stone owned the Inn. Their sons, John, Steve, and Jeff, and I hung out. We had a ball. It was a beautiful time on Whidbey. I worked at the Inn until the summer of 1975. A conflict with the Inn manager resulted in my quitting the job. I spent a lot of time enjoying Front Street and visiting with the owners of the many different shops there that summer and I happened to be sitting in front of Harbormaster's building on a bench one morning and saw people going in to the Mariner's Court Building. On the right was the Honey Bear and I met a couple of young women who were watching the store for Virginia that day. I asked the girls where someone could get a cup of coffee, and was told that they could make coffee for me right there. It turned out that there used to be a coffee shop in the back and the girls brewed coffee for us.

It looked like somebody had had a sandwich shop there. There was a Pepsi menu board, listing hot dogs, popcorn, soda, and sandwiches. There were 4 tables, 16 chairs, 5 bar stools, a refrigerator, a wooden cutting board, a hot dog machine, pop corn machine, and plumbed in coffee machine.

Judy: Who owned Mariner's Court?

Michael: Randy Duggan owned and managed the building and he was anxious to get somebody in there. I contacted Randy and told him that I would love to rent the space from him, as I had some experience in restaurants. Prior to coming to Whidbey I had worked at a country club as a cook's helper; had been a bus boy in a cocktail lounge, and at 16 I became a cook there. This was way back in 1967, and I learned to prepare "real" food for the diners of The Tartan Lounge in Redlands while attending High School during the day. I also worked at other restaurants in California but had never considered opening my own restaurant. However, with this opportunity staring at me, I decided that I could put something together.

Randy said I could have the space for \$80 per month, including the equipment. I scraped the money together. I traded the hot dog and popcorn machines to a restaurant supply for grills, a crock pot and other supplies and equipment. Ron Borgstrom, the owner of Main Street Market was kind enough to extend me a line of credit so I could purchase my first groceries.

I knew how to make poached eggs, ham and bacon, Eggs Benedict, and great omelet's, but I didn't know how to make soups so I called my mom on the eve of my opening and asked her. Mom taught me to make soup over the telephone. I was a vegetarian at the time so I had to convert Mom's meat based soups to vegetarian stocks, and the soups were a big success.

I lived at the Bachelors Quarters rental homes at Fort Casey at this time, and had a nice kitchen there in which to prepare most of my foods, as the space in Mariners Court was lacking ovens and other professional equipment. During the year or so that it took me to purchase proper restaurant equipment I "traveled" with my soup pot. When I visited friends at night, the soup pot would come with me! One of my favorite stories is when I was invited to stay aboard a tug boat anchored off of the Coupeville Wharf one summer evening. I made my customary pot of soup that night, and in the morning was rowed to shore by the wonderful crew!

I roasted whole turkeys and grew my own alfalfa sprouts for sandwiches. I also served a lot of coffee and eventually espresso drinks. My opening day at Michael's Your Place Restaurant in Mariners Court was Saturday, May 15, 1976. I served just breakfast and lunch. I remember calling home and saying I made \$50 my first day. I thought that was great. Things soon improved much beyond that beginning day.

I initially did it all myself; cooked, served, collected the cash, and washed dishes. Within six months I had hired various young people from Coupeville to help me with serving and dishwashing. Nancy Tatman Bailey was one of my best waitresses, as was Janie Wilson. Janie accompanied me, a gentleman named Cloud, and his friend from Sanibel Island, Florida on one of my annual Florida trips back in 1980, and she ended up getting married and staying in Florida!

I was originally open from 9:00 to 2:30. For the first six years I worked in the evenings at various jobs to help support the restaurant. I worked at Duffer's Cove, the Navy golf course as a bartender; at the old Harbor House as bartender, and the Kings Table restaurant as a cook.

In 1981 I expanded "Your Place" by adding a back room. The space had been Dorothea Hedgecock's "Studio 4", and I had noticed that she never used the space. Dorothea was happy to let me have the space. I introduced an expanded dinner menu and non-vegetarian items. Bill Skubi came to work for me. I added a second oven... then a third oven, and I expanded to the back and added a walk-in refrigerator. Bill and I worked and lived together for a while, and were able to develop an exciting combination of eclectic and northwest cuisine. I changed the interior front of the restaurant and put in the bay windows. Daya Sievadas, known by Glen at the time did the work. He also did the beautiful entry to the Mariner's Court with the stained glass, and most of what was done for me was arranged through dining trades.

add to list

Judy: Did you have anything to do with the bookstore?

name

Michael: Robin and John Rogers had opened up a bookstore at the end of the hall and to the left of restaurant but it had nothing to do with restaurant. Robin and John decided to quit and were packing up. They were moving the books and I told them I would buy them all. I kept it as a library and I added 3 or 4 tables in 1980 or '81.

Sometime in 1982 we discontinued breakfast and lunch and just served dinner. I married in 1984 and started spending less time at the restaurant. My mom, Anna, ran the restaurant while I travelled and had fun. Everyone called her "Mama" and she was there a lot more than I was during 1982-84. Prior to Mom helping out at the restaurant, my younger brother Rudy, and older brother Hans had worked with me. Travelling and fun did not last however, and I was divorced in 1984.

I spent the summer of 1984 camping at Baker Lake; only coming back to the Island for a couple of days a week to check the mail and pay bills. I had a friend at the time that planned to move to Las Vegas that winter and suggested that I come down there and check it out, so I packed up my truck and headed to Nevada that November.

Judy: Why Las Vegas?

Michael: I had spent the whole summer at Baker Lake until it got too cold. Las Vegas was an exciting new adventure for me, and I knew that there would be lots of work. I worked as a food and beverage manager for a casino on the strip, and also worked as a movie extra on various projects while I was there.

While at my casino position I met Rosi. She was there on her first visit to the U.S. from Salzburg, Austria, and we soon hooked up due to our shared language. Rosi and I were married one month later in Torrance, California and soon were on our way back to Whidbey. We leased and refurbished the Victorian home at 606 Main St., and opened Rosi's Restaurant in late 1986. I attribute much of our success to the support of our community, as well as to Dorothea and Margaret Hedgecock, who were great clients as well as financial supporters. We worked hard and were very successful there, and were blessed with the birth of my daughter Demi at Coupeville General Hospital on December 27, 1991. Rosi had grown increasingly unhappy with life on the Island, and pleaded for a change. A decision was made in 1991 to sell the restaurant and move to California.

While traveling in our Bluebird motor home we found a restaurant location for sale in San Clemente, California. We lived in the bus while refurbishing the location, and opened for business within six months of signing our lease. In spite of being busy, it cost \$5K per month just to stay open. We soon sold our assets, and decided to move to the desert to La Quinta in 1992. We bought a big home for \$105,000, on "dreams and promises" and both went to work. I held several positions before landing a bar manager's job at the La Quinta Resort Hotel, and Rosi soon went to school to become a massage therapist. My love for the Northwest, and Rosi's desire to stay in California eventually led to a divorce in 2002. I lived near Rosi and my daughter for about a year before deciding to move back to Whidbey. My mother lived with me at the time, and needed constant care due to her Alzheimer's disease.

Judy: Why did you decide to come back here?

Michael: I have loved Whidbey Island and its inhabitants since first arriving here in 1968. Another big factor was that I had met a lovely young woman at my restaurant in 1977, with which I had maintained contact over all of those many years of absence from the

Island. Lori Johnson and I had dated over a period of several years off and on, and I remained attracted to Lori.

Judy: Where is Demi?

Michael: Demi is in La Quinta, California. She will be graduating from high school next year. She has come up almost every summer but she is a California girl. It's too cold for her here. I am excited that she plans to be here this July!

Judy: What are you doing now?

Michael: I married Lori on October 24, 2003, while waiting for my home in California to sell. When Mom and I arrived in June of 2004 I enjoyed doing everything but working for a brief while, and then worked for awhile in real estate and as a food and beverage manager for a local businesses. I've been in construction and have helped to build four homes in Admiral's Cove, and have installed new septic systems throughout the Island. I found hard physical work to be extremely enjoyable.

I returned to college in 2006 after a 37 year absence, and have just received my Bachelor's Degree from Western Washington University this June. I've been working with children in foster care; I am a hospice volunteer, and am a counselor at a private school for troubled teenage boys. I love my life!

Judy: What do you remember about Front Street?

Michael: Brian had a stained glass shop on Grace Street above Priesing's print shop.

I remember Mike Williams and John and Beth Tristao. In 1977 John came here with the Bongo and Guy Show. John was famous for "getting in the way" while I was busy cooking. Tim Irving brought him here and they played at the Sea Gull. I flew to California and cooked for the band a couple of times. The people who were around then were Barry Burton, Daya Sievadas, Susan Wutzke (Berg), Jan, Ken and Claire Pickard, Louise Holloway and Ted Stanley, Larry Chapman, Sandra Bachman, Bobby Bailey, and Nancy Tatman Bailey, Bill Skubi and Willie and Janet Caselton, Terry Williams, Tim Irving, and R.C.

Judy: What else was in Mariner's Court?

Michael: The Honey Bear was in the right front. In the left front was Pelicans Pocket gift shop. Next on the left was the rest room, and then Let Your Mamma Cut Your Hair beauty shop.

The Honey Bear was just in the front and they used the big open space between theirs and mine free of charge. I thought if I had the facility I could have had a larger space for dinners. I bought tables and chairs from a restaurant in Bellingham and loaded them in a horse trailer and brought them back. I opened that middle space to the other restaurant. Then I took off on one of my trips to Florida and was gone for four months. While I was gone, Virginia took over the space. When I came back she said "You weren't using it." It was about that time that Randy Duggan sold the building to Frank and Betty Rayle for \$60K .

Judy: What else do you remember about Mariner's Court?

Michael: There was a little convenience store that went in and out within months... and an antique shop that went in and out. I had a big space in the back that I used for wine cellar, on the east side on the middle. There were 3 shops on the far wall. Most of shops on the east side were empty.

It was a magical experience being in Mariner's Court. We had an annual Halloween party at the restaurant. We moved all the tables to one side and in the back room we created a dance floor. We played music and good food and lots of drink, of course. We closed the front door to the street so it was a private party. We had a \$100 prize for the best costume.

Judy: What other Front Street memories do you have?

Michael: I used to go out and have breakfast on Front Street very early. I carried a table out to the other side of the street. One car would go by every 20 minutes. When I was done I would carry it back in and get ready for work.

I remember my first arts and crafts festival. It was prior to having food booths. I thought it was impossible to serve as many people who would want to eat. I got up at midnight and pre-made sandwiches. I sold more food than I had ever sold. It was easy. I bought an old claw foot bathtub from the Lovejoy house and I had it in the hallway filled with water and sodas.

The best memories were of the people; hungry boaters pulling up on a cold and rainy evening with no place open including my own. I often opened up for these folks, warming up some soup and making friends in the process. Toby's used to close early. I remember when Dr. Kroll had the building across the street and we would get together quite often to have wine tastings.

I was the first person to open on Monday's on Front Street and that stimulated other businesses to open. I remember the Sea Gull II owned by Van Jones. He put in a breakfast bar in the front.

My memories could fill a small novel!